


Texas Department of Health

The Commissioner's Report to the Board of Health

January 16, 2003

Hot Topics



Public hearing on AIDS-medication budget deficits set for this morning

With projected budget deficits of \$37 million for fiscal years 2003 through 2005, the Texas HIV Medication Program has proposed an eligibility rule change to reduce costs. The proposed change would lower the ceiling on financial eligibility based on income from 200 percent of the federal poverty level to 140 percent, resulting in fewer individuals being eligible for HIV medication assistance. The projected deficits are a result of increased demand for services, rising drug costs, and longer stays by clients in the program. An initial public hearing held Nov. 1 resulted in more than 800 public comments about the rule change and a request from the HIV Medication Advisory Committee that the Board of Health delay the rule change until the last possible moment. A second public hearing is to be held on the morning of Jan. 16 in the Texas Board of Health meeting room. A decision on the proposed rule change will be made by the Board of Health at its Feb. 27 meeting. *For more information, contact Linda Moore, Clinical Resources Division, at (512) 490-2505 or e-mail linda.moore@tdh.state.tx.us.*



TDH offering meningococcal vaccinations in East Texas town

The Texas Department of Health is offering vaccinations against meningococcal disease Jan. 15-16 for persons ages 2 through 19 who live within the boundaries of the Cleveland Independent School District. A decision to vaccinate was made after TDH confirmed three cases of meningococcal illness in children from Cleveland, a city of about 7,600, since late October. One of the children died. Cleveland is in Liberty County northeast of Houston. The school district's boundaries include portions of Liberty, San Jacinto, and Montgomery counties. *For more information, contact Celine Hanson, Regional Director, Public Health Region 6/5S, at (713) 767-3019 or e-mail celine.hanson@tdh.state.tx.us.*



'Declaration of Health' issued

The Texas State Strategic Health Partnership, a group of public and private organizations convened by the Texas Board of Health and Texas Commissioner of Health Eduardo Sanchez, M.D., has identified a series of priority goals to improve the health of Texans and issued its *Declaration of Health*, a document committing partnership agencies to "share responsibility and accountability for creating a healthier Texas." *For more information, contact Rick Danko, Office of Strategic Health Planning, at (512) 458-7111, ext. 1-6566, or e-mail rick.danko@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Training in risk communications offered to TDH executive management

Nationally recognized communications expert Dr. Vincent Covello will lead a one-day Crisis Emergency and Risk Communication training workshop on Jan. 24 for TDH executive staff and regional directors. The hands-on workshop will be held at Austin Community College's Pinnacle Campus. The training also will be satellite-broadcast through the Health Alert Network. Dr. Covello is founder and director of the Center for Risk Communication. He has consulted for Fortune 500 companies and several hundred government agencies, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. His most recent assignments include trainings, workshops, and consultations related to bioterrorism, the West Nile virus, downsizings, reorganizations, and radioactive-waste disposal. *For more information, contact Emily Palmer, Office of Communications, at (512) 458-7111, ext. 1-2213, or e-mail emily.palmer@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Obesity-prevention plan to be introduced at upcoming conference

Dr. William Klish, chair of the Statewide Obesity Taskforce, of which TDH is a part, and Commissioner of Health Eduardo Sanchez, M.D., will roll out the *Strategic Plan for the Prevention of Obesity in Texas* on Feb. 13 in San Antonio as part of the Promoting Healthy Weight in Texas conference co-sponsored by the Texas Public Health Association and UT's Fitness Institute of Texas. Featured speakers at the conference include Dr. William Deitz, director of CDC's Division of Nutrition and Physical Activity, and Deanna Hoelscher with the UT Health Science Center at Houston, who will present data on physical activity and the nutritional status of Texas schoolchildren. *For more information, contact Claire Heiser, Public Health Nutrition Program, at (512) 458-7111, ext. 2298, or e-mail claire.heiser@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Thanks to bait drops, gray foxes and coyotes singing, 'Bye-bye, rabies'

For the ninth year, TDH will air-drop bait food filled with oral rabies vaccine. Starting early this month, the Oral Rabies Vaccination Program will be dropping about 2.5 million baits from airplanes flying across 50 counties in South Texas. TDH initiated the plan in 1995 and dropped baits to create zones of vaccinated coyotes and gray foxes to stop the spread of the rabies virus, and to then eliminate canine and gray-fox rabies. The number of canine-rabies cases in South Texas has declined from a high of 142 in 1995 to none in 2002 (through October). Cases of rabies in gray foxes have shown a similar decline, from 244 in 1995 to just 54 in 2002 (through October). *For more information, contact Tom Sidwa, Oral Rabies Vaccination Program, at (512) 458-7255 or e-mail tom.sidwa@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Response teams' smallpox vaccinations to start in late January

The Texas Stage 1 Smallpox Vaccination Plan, approved by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in mid-December, was announced at a press conference Dec. 13 by Commissioner of Health Eduardo Sanchez, M.D. This plan calls for the identification, screening, and vaccination of 3,300 public health response-team members from TDH, regions, and local health departments along with 36,700 hospital response-team members. Screening and training is under way, and the vaccination effort should begin in late January. CDC has indicated that Stage 2—the vaccination of police, fire, and EMS personnel, perhaps as many as 700,000 in Texas—will begin during the spring of 2003. *For more information, contact Dennis Perrotta, Office of the State Epidemiologist, at (512) 458-7219 or e-mail dennis.perrotta@tdh.state.tx.us.*



HRSA grant to fund hospital planning for bioterrorism response

The planning process for ensuring hospital preparedness in the event of a bioterrorism event has begun. Twelve of the state's 22 Trauma Service Areas (representing a total of 576 Texas hospitals) have scheduled and held initial meetings with their hospitals. These meetings have gone well, and the planning groups are already starting to meet. Local plans on how the Health Resources and Services Administration dollars are to be spent within each Trauma Service Area will be submitted to TDH by the end of January. Funds should start to go out to the hospitals at the beginning of February. *For more information, contact Ron Hilliard, Bioterrorism Hospital Preparedness Program, at (512) 458-7219 or e-mail ron.hilliard@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Disease Outbreaks, Investigations, and Recalls



Flu-activity level now lower than in December

As of Jan. 11, flu activity in Texas, as reported to the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, is classified as "regional," or level 2, indicating flu circulation in counties with less than half of the state's population. In the past week, types A and B have been identified in Houston, Temple, Belton, and Austin; type A alone has been identified in Bryan/College Station, and type B alone has been identified in Waco and Dallas. The highest flu activity level—level 3, called "widespread"—was experienced by the state in the first three weeks of December. Starting in November, there were many school-district closings in northeast and north Texas counties because of flu-like illnesses in children. Type B was identified in many of these affected areas. Because most school-age children have not been previously exposed to this strain, many were affected. Since Sept. 29, 2002, when this reporting season began, flu has been identified in 23 Texas counties. So far, the strains identified are a good match for this year's flu vaccine. Please remember: It's not too late to get a flu shot. *For more information, contact Neil Pascoe, Infectious Disease Epidemiology and Surveillance Division, at (512) 458-7676 or e-mail neil.pascoe@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Foodborne illness investigated at Air Force base

TDH staff in Region 8 assisted Laughlin Air Force Base officials and local health officials with their investigation of a foodborne illness that affected base personnel and dependents. The offending agent, Salmonella bacteria, was brought under control at the Del Rio-area airbase through a series of well-coordinated efforts. *For more information, contact Trudi Nekomoto at (210) 949-2974 or e-mail trudi.nekomoto@tdh.state.tx.us.*



'Toy Sweep 2002' clears unsafe toys from store shelves

An educational campaign called "Toy Sweep 2002" was conducted Nov. 18-22 by the Product Safety Division to inform retailers and consumers about toys and other children's articles recalled by manufacturers because of hazards or defects. Inspectors visited 93 retail stores in the Austin, Dallas/Fort Worth, El Paso, and Houston areas to provide retailers with product-recall information and to review store inventories. Retailers were advised to remove recalled products from their store displays and to return the items to the manufacturer. Product Safety staff also participated in 11 radio, TV, and newspaper interviews across the state to inform the public about recalled products and to give parents tips on choosing safe toys. Toy Sweep activities and other year-round recall-effectiveness checks are conducted under the Product Safety Division's cooperative

agreement with the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission. *For more information, contact Annabelle Dillard, Field Operations and Compliance Branch, Product Safety Division, at (512) 834-6773, ext. 2270, or e-mail annabelle.dillard@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Conferences and Work Groups



‘Texas counts!’ at Bureau of Vital Statistics Conference

At the 48th annual Bureau of Vital Statistics Conference, held Dec. 8-10 in Austin and sponsored by the Bureau of Vital Statistics and the Texas Public Health Association, 464 partners in vital statistics from throughout the state attended special training sessions and workshops. Conference attendees included county and district clerks, justices of the peace, funeral-home directors, hospital staff, birthing-center staff, and midwives. With a conference theme of “Texas Counts!,” sessions addressed the challenges of “counting” all of the vital statistics throughout Texas and the ways in which that information “counts” in understanding the public’s health, designing programs, and improving the health of Texans. *For more information, contact Steven Elkins, Bureau of Vital Statistics, Vital Registration Division, at (512) 458-7367 or e-mail steven.elkins@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Thousands participate in Texas EMS Conference

More than 3,000 participants attended the seventh annual Texas EMS Conference, held Nov. 23-27 in Austin. More than 150 vendors filled up 132,000 square feet of exhibit-hall space with helicopters, ambulances, fire trucks, and even a crash simulator. The highlight of the event was the EMS awards luncheon, where Dr. Sanchez provided remarks, a moving ceremony honored EMS personnel lost in the line of duty, and awards were presented to EMS firms and individuals. EMS constituency organizations such as the EMS Association of Texas, the Texas Ambulance Association, the Texas College of Emergency Physicians, the Texas Trauma Coordinators Forum, and the Texas Association of Regional Advisory Councils accepted the TDH invitation to hold their meetings in conjunction with our conference. The quarterly Governor’s EMS and Trauma Advisory Council meetings were also held; they included five standing-committee meetings and three task-force meetings. *For more information, contact Kelly Harrell, EMS Information and Injury Prevention, at (512) 834-6743 or e-mail kelly.harrell@tdh.state.tx.us.*



TB conference held in Las Cruces

TDH staff from the TB Elimination Division attended the “UNIDOS 2002: Developing Leadership in Health Care” conference in Las Cruces, N.M., held Nov. 20-22, and presented information on TB to the participants. *For more information, contact Charles Wallace, TB Elimination Division, at (512) 458-7447 or e-mail charles.wallace@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Conference in Houston co-hosted by Refugee Health Screening Program

A conference in Houston on refugee issues, held Nov. 17-20, was sponsored by the Refugee Health Screening Program at TDH in cooperation with the Office of Immigration and Refugee Affairs of the Texas Department of Human Services. About 200 participants attended. *For more information, contact Sam Householder, Refugee Health Screening Program, at (512) 458-7494 or e-mail sam.householder@tdh.state.tx.us.*



New work group to advise TDH on African-American perspective on HIV/AIDS

The Bureau of HIV and STD Prevention recently convened an ad hoc advisory work group of African-American leaders to join the fight against HIV/STD in Texas. In the first of up to three planned meetings, held Nov. 15, the group began the process of advising the bureau on how to respond effectively to the epidemic of HIV and STD among African Americans in Texas. The group's work will initially focus on recommendations contained in *HIV/AIDS: African American Perspectives and Recommendations for State and Local AIDS Directors and Health Departments*, published by the National Alliance of State and Territorial AIDS Directors. This monograph has been distributed to regional and local health directors in Texas. *For more information, contact Larry Cuellar, Bureau of HIV and STD Prevention, at (512) 490-2515 or e-mail larry.cuellar@tdh.state.tx.us; or contact Casey Blass, Bureau of HIV and STD Prevention, at (512) 490-2515 or e-mail casey.blass@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Work group studies best practices to prevent teen pregnancy

The Teen Pregnancy Prevention Workgroup is continuing its efforts to develop a sustained and integrated approach to TDH prevention of teen pregnancy. The work group has developed a draft TDH policy for teen-pregnancy prevention, including a list of best practices. In January, a guide will be completed for TDH program staff to use to provide consistent and up-to-date information on teen pregnancy in Texas. The work group is also preparing a proposal for a collaborative effort with the Office of the Attorney General to address teen pregnancy and related issues. *For more information, contact Norma Alvarez, Office of Special Projects, Bureau of Women's Health, at (512) 458-7796 or e-mail norma.alvarez@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Administration



First payroll run through newly implemented HHSAS-HRMS a success

At the last Board of Health meeting, an update was provided on the project to implement the Health and Human Services Administrative System-Human Resource Management System (HHSAS-HRMS). Since then, the computer system has gone from a testing phase into live production. Its first payroll ran successfully through both the HHSAS-HRMS and the Comptroller's Office on Dec. 17, exceeding the Comptroller's direct-deposit deadline by five days. TDH and the Texas Health and Human Services Commission are the first two health-and-human-services state agencies to implement the HHSAS-HRMS. Three important functions—human resources, payroll, and time and labor records—have now been added to the Human Resources Management System. *For more information, contact Sharon Brewer, HHSAS Project, at (512) 458-7456 or e-mail sharon.brewer@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Goals being met in reconciling financial systems

In an effort to get current on the process of reconciling the agency's Health and Human Services Administrative System (HHSAS) with the financial system used by the state Comptroller, called USAS, the services of four contractors have been obtained; they will work with staff in the Fiscal Division. As additional resources for this effort, the State Comptroller's Office furnished two full-time employees, use of a programmer, and access to its computer system. Because the State Auditor's Office raised concerns about its ability to rely on financial information from fiscal year 2002 until that year's data is

reconciled, the goal of reconciling that year's high-priority items by Dec. 20 was met, and completion of remaining items is continuing. Other goals include reconciling fiscal year 2003 through the month of December and developing procedures that will allow Fiscal Division staff to maintain the reconciliation process on an ongoing basis. *For more information, contact Paul Roch, Bureau of Financial Services, at (512) 458-7674 or e-mail paul.roch@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Security standard adopted for information systems

As strategic and vital assets, information systems and data at TDH must be available and protected. Under the Texas Administrative Code, Title 1, Part 10, Chapter 202, "Information Security Standards," TDH is required to take measures to protect these assets against unauthorized access, disclosure, modification, or destruction, whether accidental or deliberate, as well as to assure the availability, integrity, utility, authenticity, and confidentiality of information. On Dec. 2, the TDH Information Resources Steering Committee adopted the IT Architecture Standard for Security. This comprehensive standard addresses management of the security program, user security practices, and security safeguards, and includes business continuity planning. *For more information, contact Tom Thornton, Associateship for Information Systems, at (512) 458-7271 or e-mail tom.thornton@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Administrative service centers in place and at work

TDH administrative service centers began operations last month to consolidate administrative and fiscal duties in centers located in Austin, regional offices, and hospitals. Employees who perform duties in accounting, purchasing, grant and contract management, human resources, and information systems are now aligned in a central administrative service center that seeks to reduce inconsistent business practices and improve effectiveness. The service centers were recommended by the Fiscal and Administrative Improvement Response teams which evaluated TDH's current business practices and made recommendations for more efficient and standardized processes in each function. To date, the teams have identified gaps in policy and procedures and identified best practices for each area. Policy and procedures reflecting best practices should be in place by mid-February. *For more information, contact Machel Pharr, Chief Financial Officer, at (512) 458-7426 or e-mail machelle.pharr@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Bureau for Resource Management gets new chief

Jackson Kramer, director of the Customer Support Division in the Bureau of Resource Management, has been selected as the new bureau chief for BRM. He replaces John Burlinson, who retired on Nov. 30. In an effort to further reduce the administrative budget, this position was posted only within the bureau and attracted three applicants, all BRM division directors. Before coming to TDH in December 2000, Mr. Kramer held a number of positions with increasing responsibility within the Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission. He has a B.A. in Government/Public Administration from the University of Texas at Austin. The position he previously held will be deleted and the bureau reorganized under the remaining division directors. *For more information, contact Wanda Thompson, Associateship for Operational Support, at (512) 458- 7720 or e-mail wanda.thompson@tdh.state.tx.us.*



New year brings new director to Human Resources Management Division

Ernie Klatt retired as director of the Human Resources Management Division in the Bureau of Human Resources on Dec. 31. James Williams, employment manager with the Office of the Ombudsman, has been named acting director of the division. Mr. Williams began his state career in 1977 at the Governor's Office and has since served as assistant director of the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Human Services, as regional Human Resources manager at DHS-Austin Region, and as director of Human Resources at the Texas Water Development Board and at the Texas Natural Conservation Commission. He has an M.A. from the University of Oklahoma and a B.A. from Langston University in Oklahoma. He will serve in this acting capacity until Sharon Brewer completes her special assignment on the HHSAS Project and returns to her position as bureau chief of Human Resources, at which point the position of division director will be deleted. *For more information, contact Wanda Thompson, Associateship for Operational Support, at (512) 458- 7720 or e-mail wanda.thompson@tdh.state.tx.us.*



New parking policy to give the boot to repeated violators

To combat a growing problem with employee parking violations, TDH will implement a new parking policy on Feb. 1 with a more stringent and progressive discipline process for violators. Under the new policy, an employee's first parking offense will get them a ticket and a letter explaining the consequences of future violations. A second offense will result in another ticket and another letter, with a copy to the employee's bureau chief, notifying them of future consequences. A third violation will result in "booting" the vehicle (placement of a wheel-locking device that prevents driving). To remove the boot, the employee's deputy commissioner will have to walk out to the vehicle and unlock the device; if the deputy is unavailable, the employee's associate commissioner can do it. No one else is authorized to remove the boot except the security manager in a life-threatening situation. Additional violations after receiving the boot will result in the vehicle's being towed at the employee's expense. This policy change will affect only a relatively small number of staff. In the past year, TDH issued 534 parking tickets at a campus with slightly fewer than 2,000 employees. Only 46 employees had more than two tickets issued to them—with the number of tickets ranging from three to 21 per employee. *For more information, contact Wanda Thompson, Associateship for Operational Support, at (512) 458- 7720 or e-mail wanda.thompson@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Communications and Campaigns



Radio stations make record use of TDH audio news feeds

In December, radio stations across the state availed themselves of 5,569 downloads, a record number, from the TDH Office of Communications audio news feeds, which contain recorded health messages that radio stations air for their customers. The number of downloads overtakes the previous record, set in July, by more than 2,000. Although tracking software does not specify which of the stories generated the most interest, responses to the news feeds' accompanying online pop-up survey indicate that the increase may be attributed to the special report issued on the Texas plan for providing smallpox vaccinations. *For more information, contact Andrea Morrow, Office of Communications, at (512) 458-7111, ext. 1-6586, or e-mail andrea.morrow@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Media requests seek TDH expertise and data

During the month of December, the Office of Communications received 52 media requests for information about TDH, many in reference to the flu and early closings of schools for the holidays. Others sought information on emergency response teams, hepatitis A, methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus, rabies, the “Toy Sweep,” the West Nile virus, and HIV medications. Sixty media calls were received in November, one from the *Washington Post* asking about counterfeit drugs. Other calls referenced funding for abstinence education, regulations on bedding, bioterrorism preparedness, cancer data, emergency services, flu, handovers, HIV medications, lead hazards, rabies rules, shigellosis outbreaks, tanning salons, tattoo and body piercing, teen pregnancy, the “Toy Sweep,” and the West Nile virus. The Spanish-language TV networks Telemundo and Univision call regularly for TDH information. *For more information, contact Doug McBride, Office of Communications, at (512) 458-7524 or e-mail doug.mcbride@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Internal communications: 100 Town Hall questions, updated publications policy

Staff from across the agency e-mailed, faxed, and handwrote 100 questions to Commissioner Sanchez before, during, and after his Town Hall meeting of Nov. 15, which was satellite-broadcast to regional facilities. Those questions were compiled, edited, and sent to appropriate programs for responding information. Thirty of the completed question-and-response sets were posted online in December, and the remaining 70 will be posted throughout January and February. A publications policy is being developed to ensure professional quality of TDH publications. A second update of it, along with its proposed standards and guidelines, was sent to 22 preliminary reviewers on Jan. 13. Revisions had been made to it based on 45 comments received from staffers throughout the agency who had reviewed an earlier version. Responses are expected at the end of February, at which time the policy, standards, and guidelines will be finalized for submission to the formal review process. *For more information, contact Shelly Ogle, Office of Communications, at (512) 458-7111, ext. 1-2200, or e-mail shelly.ogle@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Highly effective tobacco-prevention campaign ‘raps’ out its message

“Do you really wanna get sucked into a breath-stinkin’, teeth-stainin’, rat-poisin-containin’, brown-spit-makin’, law-violatin’, nicotine-addictin’ habit? It’s your call. Tobacco is foul.” That’s the chorus of the new rap advertisement on radio that TDH is debuting as a part of the ongoing “duck” campaign of the Texas Tobacco Prevention Initiative targeting youth. East Texas and Houston are the primary sites for this campaign because of their high rate of lung cancer and other tobacco-related diseases and their demographically diverse populations, which are heavily targeted by the tobacco industry. Based on other states’ best practices and findings from community forums and focus groups held in the autumn of 1999, TDH and its partners are focusing on school and community programs, cessation, enforcement, and media. The findings of a statewide survey on tobacco use among middle-school and high-school students, done in 1999 and again in 2001, show that public health regions in Houston and Beaumont saw a 35 percent reduction in smoking rates and a 30 percent overall reduction in the use of any tobacco products, including cigars, pipes, snuff, and chewing tobacco. Both figures are nearly double the state averages of 20 percent and 17 percent, respectively. *For more information, contact Phil Huang, Bureau of Chronic Disease and Tobacco Prevention, at (512) 458-7234 or e-mail philip.huang@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Organ-donation campaign to reach out to African-Americans

The Bureau of Kidney Health Care is currently contracting with Interlex Advertising to develop an organ-donation awareness and education campaign specifically targeted toward African Americans ages 18-45. In order to convey a sense of authenticity, the campaign will include African-American participation during development at the creative and organizational levels. Components of the campaign include television and radio public-service announcements, educational materials, a Collegiate Summit, and the creation of an African-American Organ Alliance (this group will serve as an advisory body, consisting of key figures from within the African-American community). *For more information, contact Phil Walker, Bureau of Kidney Health Care, at (512) 834-4551 or e-mail phil.walker@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Media campaign urges adults to quit smoking

A new tobacco-cessation campaign targeting adult males ages 20-40 was launched in time for the new year. The campaign has already generated significant media attention. Three TV spots have been created, including one in Spanish. The spots are being distributed statewide, including purchased media time in the Houston and Beaumont/Port Arthur areas. *For more information, contact Philip Huang, Bureau of Chronic Disease and Tobacco Prevention, at (512) 458-7200 or e-mail philip.huang@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Program Updates



New system of distributing HIV medication working seamlessly

A pilot study for a new medication-distribution system for the Texas HIV Medication Program (THMP) was initiated in September and completed in October. Since Oct. 14, medications are being purchased by the THMP wholesaler, McKesson, and distributed directly by the TDH Pharmacy to participating pharmacies statewide. The system no longer requires the wholesaler to also act as the distributor of medications to participating pharmacies. Thus far, the change has been seamless to client-customers, and the THMP has received one letter congratulating THMP staff on the improvement in the rapidity with which HIV medications are delivered to participating pharmacies. This new delivery mechanism is expected to save the program approximately \$500,000, which can then be used to purchase medications. *For more information, contact Linda Moore, Clinical Resources Division, at (512) 490-2505 or e-mail linda.moore@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Radioactive Superfund site in Houston cleaned up

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, assisted by health-physics support from the TDH Bureau of Radiation Control, recently completed a Superfund cleanup action at the Tavenor-Gulf Nuclear Site, located inside Houston's city limits. A TDH survey and the collection of samples have verified a successful cleanup. When in operation, the facility, which made radioactive tracers and sources for medical, petrochemical, and oil-exploration industries, dispersed radioactive wastewater through a lateral system of drainage pipes. The cleanup included excavating and transporting the soil from the drainage field for disposal off-site and disassembling and transporting the buildings and foundations for disposal off-site. TDH requested and received EPA assistance in follow-up cleaning of the site, or "decommissioning," after the facility's parent company

claimed bankruptcy last year and abdicated its cleanup responsibilities. The EPA held a closing ceremony at the site on Dec. 13, where Bureau of Radiation Control staff members joined those from the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry to discuss this project's success with members of the public. *For more information, contact Richard Ratliff, Bureau of Radiation Control, at (512) 834-6688 or e-mail richard.ratliff@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Progress on achieving reductions in tobacco use reported to Legislature

The legislatively mandated report, *Progress on Achieving Tobacco Reductions: A Report to the 78th Legislature*, was submitted before its deadline of Dec. 1. Highlighted in the report was the fact that, from 1999 to 2001, there has been a 30 percent reduction in tobacco use among 6th-graders through 12th-graders, as well as a 14 percent reduction in tobacco use among 18-22-year-old adults in the public health regions that include pilot areas funded at \$3 per capita. These results are consistent with meeting the legislative goals of a 60 percent reduction in youth tobacco use by 2010. *For more information, contact Philip Huang, Bureau of Chronic Disease and Tobacco Prevention, at (512) 458-7200 or e-mail philip.huang@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Reynosa Binational TB Project back on its feet

The Reynosa Binational TB Project ended a seven-month hiatus and returned to full activity on Oct. 1 after Dr. Eduardo Sanchez, Texas Commissioner of Health, and Dr. Hector Lopez, Health Secretary of Tamaulipas, met in Laredo on Sept. 17 to arrange for the project's reinstatement after it was reorganized to improve services to patients and was brought up to standards set by TDH and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *For more information, contact Charles Wallace, TB Elimination Division, at (512) 458-7447 or e-mail charles.wallace@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Preventing violence against women

Grant activities are under way on the Violence Against Women Prevention Project in the Bureau of Women's Health. The Office of Special Projects was awarded a \$50,000 grant from the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to establish a statewide advisory committee that will develop a strategic plan to prevent violence against women. The plan will focus on primary prevention in public health. The award period ends in September 2003, at which time implementation funds can be applied for, based on the strategic plan. *For more information, contact Mary McIntosh, Office of Special Projects, Bureau of Women's Health, at (512) 458-7796 or e-mail mary.mcintosh@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Communities to be evaluated on prevention of cardiovascular disease and stroke

The Texas Council on Cardiovascular Disease and Stroke met on Nov. 21 to review plans for the Heart-Smart Site recognition program and to approve the final list of 10 indicators chosen by the council's Heart-Healthy/Stroke-Free Community Program to measure a community's development of comprehensive cardiovascular-health plans and programs. The council asked TDH and the American Heart Association to continue developing the programs, with roll-out expected this summer. The council plans to continue the Texas Cardiovascular Health Promotion Awards for 2003; they'll be presented at the council's conference this year. The Cardiovascular Health and Wellness regional staff and American Heart Association regional staff assisted with the identification of 11 communities where trainings will be held on the Heart-Healthy/Stroke-Free Community

Program, as well as 11 communities where forums will be held on health disparities. The forums will focus on African Americans, youth, and people with cardiovascular disease or stroke, and will identify barriers to and opportunities for implementing programs that will reach those specific populations. *For more information, contact Jennifer Smith, Cardiovascular Health and Wellness Program, at (512) 458-7670 or e-mail jennifer.smith@tdh.state.tx.us.*



CDC assigns public health advisor for binational TB projects

On Feb. 9, David Montanez will begin his assignment with the State of Texas as a public health advisor to work with binational tuberculosis projects. Mr. Montanez has worked as a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention public health advisor for 14 years in four different programs. He has a bachelor's degree in business administration, a master's degree in public administration, and a master's of arts degree in urban and regional affairs. *For more information, contact Charles Wallace, TB Elimination Division, at (512) 458-7447 or e-mail charles.wallace@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Ten Against TB named as technical advisory committee

Ten Against TB representatives met in San Diego with the U.S.-Mexico Border Health Commission on Nov. 22 to propose that Ten Against TB become the technical advisory committee for the U.S.-Mexico Border Health Commission. The proposal was accepted. *For more information, contact Jose Moreira, TB Elimination Division, at (512) 458-7447 or e-mail jose.moreira@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Texas HIV/STD InfoLine available to students through schools

To coincide with TDH's STD Awareness Media Campaign in the Dallas/Fort Worth media market on Oct. 7, the Texas HIV/STD InfoLine Community Calls brochure was mailed out to 1,200 middle schools, alternative schools, and independent school districts. With the use of a speakerphone, a classroom can participate in an InfoLine Community Call with a TDH health information specialist trained to answer students' questions. This new and free service is designed to help students learn about preventing HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted conditions. *For more information, contact Jay Todd, Training and Public Education, at (512) 490-2535, ext. 2613, or e-mail jay.todd@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Panel discusses cancer screenings for women with disabilities

As part of a panel discussion with staff from the Susan G. Komen Foundation and the Seton Cancer Screening Program, staff from the TDH Breast and Cervical Cancer Control Program participated in a presentation on women with disabilities and their access to screenings for breast and cervical cancer. The focus of the presentation was to raise awareness of barriers that women with disabilities face and to speak to the importance of women with disabilities and health-care professionals addressing ways to overcome the environmental, attitudinal, and informational barriers that are encountered when women with disabilities access services for breast- and cervical-cancer screening. Conference participants included clients of the Austin/Travis County Mental Health and Mental Retardation system, members of community organizations, and health-care professionals. *For more information, contact Claudia Himes, Breast and Cervical Cancer Control Program, at (512) 458-7644 or e-mail claudia.himes@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Pediatric Diabetes Research Advisory Committee finishes report

The Pediatric Diabetes Research Advisory Committee has completed its report and prepared recommendations that cases of diabetes diagnosed before the age of 21 be reported to TDH and that the Legislature support the creation of the Texas Pediatric Diabetes Research Resource. *For more information, contact Jan Ozias, Texas Diabetes Program/Council, at (512) 458-7490 or e-mail jan.ozias@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Council of Independent Licensing Board Chairs meets

The Council of Independent Licensing Board Chairs met on Nov. 15 to discuss the upcoming Sunset Review of seven boards housed in the Professional Licensing and Certification Division, the status of the Health Professions Council report relating to complaint procedures and complaint information open to the public, cumulative information from customer surveys, and homeland security in relation to the mental-health licensing boards. *For more information, contact Debbie Peterson, Professional Licensing and Certification Division, at (512) 834-6628 or e-mail debbie.peterson@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Joining CDC/NCI/USDA project aimed at cervical-cancer deaths being considered

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention, the National Cancer Institute (NCI), and the USDA have asked the TDH Breast and Cervical Cancer Control Program to participate in a collaborative project to target outreach and screening services for women in certain Texas counties with persistently high cervical-cancer mortality. The Breast and Cervical Cancer Control Program and Cancer Registry are reviewing the cancer data provided by CDC and NCI and will make a determination later in January on whether Texas will participate in this multi-year project. Additional funding would be expected for this initiative, and a national announcement between the federal agencies will be made at a later date. Several other states have also been invited to participate. *For more information, contact Rosamaria Murillo, Breast and Cervical Cancer Control Program, at (512) 458-7111, ext. 1-6471, or e-mail rosamaria.murillo@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Regional Updates

Public Health Region 1



Syndromic surveillance system to provide prompt case management

In conjunction with Sandia Laboratories in Albuquerque, N.M., the regional Epidemiology Response Team is in the process of placing a syndromic surveillance system, called the Rapid Surveillance Validation Project (RSVP), into 13 rural hospitals, and by virtue of a grant from Sandia Laboratories, the cost will be minimal for hospital participation. The system provides real-time data for prompt case management to the treating clinicians and requires less than 30 seconds to do the data entry. At the introductory meeting with the hospital's administrative representatives, all expressed a keen interest in having such a system in place as an aid to reducing geographic barriers to quality health care. *For more information, contact Barry Wilson, Regional Epidemiologist, at (806) 767-0496 or e-mail barry.wilson@tdh.state.tx.us.*



132 children with special health-care needs enjoy Christmas party

On Dec.14, staff from Region 1's Children with Special Health Care Needs program teamed with a regional contractor, Uniting Parents, to hold a Christmas party for children enrolled in CSHCN or Uniting Parents. Financial donations and goods and services were received from 27 businesses and individuals. The children were given special gift bags, enjoyed a visit from Santa, and took part in other holiday activities. More than 132 children attended, accompanied by parents, siblings, and other relatives. Region 1 staff volunteered their time to do the setup and teardown and to provide face painting, story telling, balloon animals, and "Santa" services. *For more information, contact Carol Marchbanks, EPSDT Screen Program, at (806) 767-0434 or e-mail carol.marchbanks@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Public Health Region 4 and 5 North



Thousands get medical, dental, and eye care at Texas Mission of Mercy event

The second annual Texas Mission of Mercy event, held Nov. 8-10, attracted hundreds of uninsured and low-income families and individuals to the Tyler-area town of Lindale. The event provided free dental, eye, and medical care, such as teeth cleaning and extractions, dental surgery, eye exams, vision care, emergency medical care, and women's diagnostic care. Hundreds of volunteer dentists, doctors, nurses, medical personnel, and lay people, as well as several Region 4/5 North staffers, volunteered their time and skills to the needy families. The event was coordinated by the Texas Dental Association, Texas Dentists for Healthy Smiles, and Youth With A Mission. Some 927 dental patients were served at an approximate value of more than \$370,000. Though total figures for all care provided are not available for this year, attendance was comparable to last year's event, which served 2,750 people. Texas Mission of Mercy is primarily financed by private donations from the East Texas area. Organizations such as the Rotary Club, the Tyler Lions Club, Mercy Ships, PATH, the Smith County Public Health District, Region 4/5 North, and many others helped with transportation needs, parking and security, free eyeglass distribution, and pharmacy care. *For more information, contact Maureen Weber, Regional Dentist, at (903) 533-5202 or e-mail maureen.weber@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Public Health Region 6 and 5 South



Planning under way on National Pharmaceutical Stockpile

Region 6/5 South staff have partnered with the City of Houston Health and Human Services and Harris County Public Health Services in planning for receipt and storage of the National Pharmaceutical Stockpile in the event of a smallpox outbreak. Tentative arrangements have been made to coordinate certain activities including storage, security, and staffing in order to best utilize available staff and resources. *For more information, contact Barbara Key, Public Health Preparedness, at (713) 767-3003 or e-mail barbara.key@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Regional staff shares training on communicating effectively during emergencies

Region 6/5 South recently hosted the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Alabama Public Health satellite-based training on crisis and emergency risk communication. Staff members from the City of Houston Health and Human Services and Harris County Public Health Services joined TDH staff in viewing the six-part series of broadcasts. The training introduced participants to risk-communication strategies designed to enhance the content and delivery of public health messages during an emergency. As a result of this training, participants will work together to ensure that timely and consistent public health messages are delivered in the region. *For more information, contact Brian Rutherford, Public Health Preparedness, at (713) 767-3010 or e-mail brian.rutherford@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Epidemiology response team ready to roll

The Region 6/5 South Epidemiology Response Team has been completed with the recent hiring of an administrative technician, two public health technicians, and a nurse. The team will be working to provide disease surveillance in the seven counties in the region without local health departments and will provide support in developing smallpox and other public health-preparedness plans. In preparation for the vaccination of public health and health-care workers, the team's nurse recently attended the CDC train-the-trainer course on administering the smallpox vaccine and updated regional staff on requirements to train vaccinators, set up vaccination clinics, and to properly handle the smallpox vaccine. *For more information, contact Luis Gonzalez, Regional Epidemiology Response Team Leader, at (713) 767-3343 or e-mail luis.gonzalez@tdh.state.us.us.*

Public Health Region 7



Initial after-hours emergency-notification exercise held

On the evening of Nov. 25, staff from the Region 7 Disease Control and Prevention Team participated in "Drill No. 1," an after-hours emergency-notification exercise. The pre-announced drill involved all team personnel from its seven programs: Birth Defects Monitoring, EMS, Epidemiology Response Team, HIV/STD, Immunization, TB Elimination, and Zoonosis Control. The team leader activated the drill at 7 p.m., and the test message was relayed to all staff within 90 minutes. The test message was evaluated for accuracy and timeliness, and participant feedback about the drill was solicited. This drill is the first of several designed to prepare staff to be activated after-hours in an emergency public health situation. Additional unannounced after-hours notification drills are planned. *For more information, contact Beverlee E. Nix, Zoonosis Control, at (254) 778-6744, ext. 2451, or e-mail beverlee.nix@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Round Rock group succeeds in getting no-smoking ordinance passed

The Office of Smoking and Health has supported the efforts of several anti-smoking groups in Region 7 by facilitating meetings, testifying before city councils, and providing factual data. In Round Rock, after about 18 months of work, a group called Youth and

Adults for Safe Air succeeded in getting an no-smoking ordinance passed when the city council voted 4-3 on the first reading to prohibit smoking in all public places, with exemptions for stand-alone bars and tobacco shops. The final vote came on Nov. 26, and the ordinance becomes effective on Feb. 1. In San Marcos, the Clean Air Now Coalition continues to work for a ban on smoking in all public places, a move which would replace the current ordinance requiring restaurants to have both smoking and non-smoking areas. The Marble Falls Safe Air Coalition is regrouping after an earlier attempt for a smoking ban in public places was tabled by city council, which will hear from them again this month. And, in Hillsboro, a coalition is beginning to be formed to get a smoke-free ordinance passed. *For more information, contact Sylvia Barron, Office of Smoking and Health, at (254) 778-674, ext. 2350, or e-mail sylvia.barron@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Public Health Region 8



Formalization sought for binational projects with Mexico

Region 8 staff met with Dr. Bertha Christina Castellanos-Munoz, secretary of health of the Mexican state of Coahuila, and several of her program managers on Dec. 17 to discuss shared concerns. Region 8 staff in Del Rio, Eagle Pass, Uvalde, and San Antonio have worked closely with their Mexican counterparts and are anxious to further formalize binational projects in the area. *For more information, contact Sandra Morris, Tuberculosis Elimination, at (210) 949-2196 or e-mail sandra.morris@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Hospital council urged to join Strategic Health Partnership

Also on Dec. 17, Region 8 staff were present for former Surgeon General David Satcher's presentation, "Ethics in Health Services Delivery," and later were invited to participate in a stakeholders' group convened by the Greater San Antonio Hospital Council and the Wye River Group on local successes and challenges facing health care and public health. Later in the month, TDH was asked to address the Greater San Antonio Hospital Council's membership at its monthly meeting, and a challenge was issued to the group to join the Texas State Strategic Health Partnership effort. *For more information, contact Chip Riggins, Regional Director, at (210) 949-2003, or e-mail chip.riggins@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Public Health Region 9 and 10



School-based flu clinics vaccinate 500 in Region 9/10

Region 9/10 responded to reports of widespread influenza activity by sponsoring school-based flu-vaccination clinics held during a five-day period in mid-December. More than 500 doses of vaccine were administered in Howard, Brewster, Presidio, McCulloch, and Sutton counties. Vaccine was also made available to regional local health departments in Region 9/10. *For more information, contact Sarana Savage, HIV/STD Health Resources Division, at (915) 683-9492 or e-mail sarana.savage@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Biannual conference attended by regional director

The regional director traveled to Las Cruces, N.M., to join state health directors Dr. Federico Saracho-Weber from Chihuahua and Dr. Frederick Pintz from New Mexico at the “UNIDOS 2002: Developing Leadership in Health Care” conference, held Nov. 23. Texas Commissioner of Health Eduardo Sanchez, M.D., and colleagues delivered a keynote address on public health leadership and interstate collaboration. The UNIDOS conference is held every other year to promote regional collaboration in controlling infectious diseases. The event was sponsored by TDH, the New Mexico Department of Health, and the National Francis J. Curry and Texas TB Education Centers. *For more information, contact Miguel Escobedo, Regional Director, at (915) 834-7680 or e-mail miguel.escobedo@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Collaboration with CDC, New Mexico to lead to better disease surveillance

Region 9/10 participated in a CDC site visit on Dec. 17; it was sponsored by the New Mexico Department of Health. Region 9/10 is collaborating with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and New Mexico public health authorities to set up an active surveillance program for certain emerging infectious diseases in the West Texas and southern New Mexico border area. CDC has helped set up five other such programs in other parts of the country, and Region 9/10's will become the sixth site. Data collected will add to the overall understanding of national infectious-disease trends. *For more information, contact Miguel Escobedo, Regional Director, at (915) 834-7680 or e-mail miguel.escobedo@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Epidemiology Response Team members making smallpox-vaccination plans

Epidemiology Response Team members and other key staff from Region 9/10 participated in a Homeland Security Conference in Van Horn, sponsored by the Rio Grande Council of Governments. The conference was designed to facilitate readiness planning and information exchange. Regional Epidemiology Response Team members led efforts to organize the Smallpox Advisory Council, which is helping to plan pre-event smallpox vaccination efforts targeting health-care and public health response teams in El Paso. *For more information, contact Terri Escobar, Epidemiologist Response Team, at (915) 834-7675 or e-mail terri.escobar@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Public Health Region 11



Improving the health of Mexican citizens living in the United States

Officials of the federal Ministry of Health of Mexico City came to Reynosa on Nov. 4 to discuss the health of Mexican nationals living in the United States with the faculty of the Texas A&M University School of Rural Public Health and with Region 11's director. They discussed prevention of vehicle injuries and pesticide exposure, access to care, and cardiovascular-disease prevention. The Mexican Ministry of Health consuls are quite interested in being partners with Texas communities to improve the health of their citizens living in the United States. *For more information, contact Brian Smith, Regional Director, at (956) 423-0130, ext. 502, or e-mail brian.smith@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Conference keeps staff up to date on traumatic brain injury

The Children with Special Health Care Needs Program at Region 11 co-hosted a day-long conference, in cooperation with the Cornerstone Rehab Hospital in Edinburg, to present current information to Valley-wide nurses, social workers, and therapists whose work relates to traumatic brain injury. On Nov. 5, nearly 60 health-care professionals attended this free workshop. *For more information, contact Richard Scott Horney, Social Work Services, at (956) 423-0130, ext. 648, or e-mail scott.horney@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Veterinarian works against rabies

The Region 11 Zoonosis Control Veterinarian was the TDH delegate to the 13th International Meeting on Research Advances and Rabies Control in the Americas, held Nov. 3-8 in Oaxaca, Mexico. She served as moderator for one of the sessions and participates as a member of the steering committees for both the international and the binational (U.S.-Mexico) meetings on rabies. Working with Mexico is essential to rabies control in Texas. *For more information, contact Laura Robinson, Zoonosis Control Veterinarian, Region 11, at (956) 423-0130, ext 632 or e-mail laura.robinson@tdh.state.tx.us.*